Report on Seniors' Volunteer Work and Unpaid Help to Others

prepared for

SYMPOSIUM ON SOCIAL SUPPORTS

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prepared by

National Advisory Council on Aging*

* The Council gratefully acknowledges the work of Dr. Ingrid Connidis and Forrest Frankovitch of the University of Western Ontario who did the analysis and prepared the report on which this presentation is based.

Introduction

Good morning. It is with great pleasure that on behalf of the National Advisory Council on Aging, I stand before you this morning to talk a little about seniors' volunteer work and unpaid help to others.

Most research about support and the elderly focuses on the support given to older persons by other, usually younger, persons. This research tends to emphasize problems and needs of older people and thus, the burden experienced by supporters in providing care to older people. A consequence of this research focus is an inaccurate exaggeration of the elderly's dependency and an undeserved portrayal of older persons as a burden to their families. In fact, the majority of older persons are able to function quite independently, thank you. As well, much of the support provided to older persons who do require assistance is provided by another older person, most often a spouse. This is particularly true of men, who are more likely than women to end their lives with a spouse to care for them. Therefore, most older persons maintain relative independence either individually or as couples well

into their old age. In the absence of a spouse, assistance may still be provided by other age peers, such as siblings, in-laws, friends, and neighbours.

More and more studies are documenting the support exchange between the generations and the evidence that reciprocity characterizes older parent-adult child relations. For example, in a London, Ontario study, 63 % of respondents (aged 65 and over) reported that they gave and received support. About 20 percent of the sample gave assistance and received none and 15 percent received assistance but gave none. Generally, "more financial support goes from old to middle-aged and young family members than flows in the opposite direction along generational lines". As well, in many multi-generational households, it has been found that it is often the older parents who are providing a home for their adult children, not the reverse that is so often assumed.

Some research on volunteer work also records the active role played by many senior citizens. The Survey of Volunteer Activity reported that 20% of older Canadians performed some type of volunteer service in 1987. As well, many seniors are active in veterans' clubs and seniors' groups. In the past few years,

voluntary groups of seniors providing help to other seniors have emerged across the country. Many of these exist thanks to funding from the federal government's New Horizons program.

The National Advisory Council on Aging sees a clear need for more research regarding what older people give to others in order to balance the attention that has been paid to what they receive. The experience of the members of the Council is that seniors as a group are active individuals supportive of their families and their communities. Council members realize that seniors' continuing obligation to their families, friends and community is the source of their respect and integration into society. The Council wants to see these contributions recognized.

The Council seized upon the opportunity occasioned by this Symposium to present findings from an analysis of data from the 1985 General Social Survey. Data from this survey help throw light on the routine contributions made by older persons in everyday life, to their families, friends, neighbours, and communities.

Methodology

At this point, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the work of Dr. Ingrid Connidis and Forrest Frankovitch of the University of Western Ontario who prepared, under considerable time pressure, a comprehensive report based upon the General Social Survey conducted in 1985 by Statistics Canada. The purpose of their analysis was to examine the assistance and support given by older persons to others. Several types of help were examined including: financial donations (donating money); volunteering in organizations (unpaid volunteer work); transportation; babysitting; assistance in someone else's home (housework, home maintenance, and yardwork); and personal care outside the home.

Their analysis examined how many and which older persons provide these various forms of support, and who the recipients of such support were. Specifically, their study looked for differences based upon gender (men versus women), age (55 to 64, 65 to 69, 70 to 74, 75 to 79, 80 and over), marital status (married, not married), living arrangements (live alone, live with a spouse with or without others, live with others), subjective health status (poor, fair, good, excellent), education (less than secondary, completed

secondary, more than secondary), and region of Canada (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, British Columbia). Obviously income could be another important variable, but because a fairly large number of respondents did not report their income, this variable was regrettably not included in the analysis.

RESULTS

I will take the rest of the time allotted to me today to summarize some of the findings of Connidis and Frankovitch study.

With regard to OLDER PERSONS PROVIDING SUPPORT, Table 1 summarizes the percentage of men and women who provide various forms of assistance. As can be seen, there is considerable variation, according to the type of assistance provided, with the largest proportion of men and women providing financial support and the smallest proportion providing personal care outside the home. In fact for both men and women nearly six out of ten seniors donated money. The next most likely kind of support for older men was providing transportation at 26% followed by helping in someone's home, probably home maintenance, at 22%. For older

women after donating money the next most likely form of assistance was babysitting as 26% followed by transportation or helping in the home at 18%.

A multivariate analysis was conducted to examine the effects of these variables or characteristics on the likelihood of providing the various types of assistance. As Table 2 indicates there are significant differences between men and women in the likelihood of providing all forms of support except donating money. Women are more likely than men to volunteer, babysit, help in the home and provide personal care. Men are more likely than women to assist with transportation.

Let use examine this table in detail for each kind of support. In this table, the group most likely to provide each type of assistance is listed and an asterisk (*) denotes whether a relationship was found to be significant (e.g., the relationship between subjective health and donating money).

Donating Money

Subjective health, education, living arrangements, region, and age are independently related to the likelihood of donating money. Gender is not.

Among men and women, the likelihood of donating money is affected by subjective health (the better one's health the greater the likelihood of donating money); education (the higher the education the greater the likelihood of donating money); living arrangements (those living with a spouse are more likely to donate than those living alone, who are more likely to donate than those living with someone other than a spouse); region (donations are most likely in Ontario and least likely in Quebec), and; age (the likelihood of making donations increases up to the age of 74 for men and 69 for women, and decreases thereafter).

Volunteer Work

For both men and women, the likelihood of doing volunteer work is affected by subjective health (the better one's health the greater the likelihood of volunteer work); education (the higher the education the greater the likelihood of volunteering); living arrangement (those living with spouse are more likely than those living alone to volunteer; those living alone are more likely to volunteer than those living with someone other than a spouse); volunteering peaks at ages 65-69, and then declines after that age; more volunteering takes place in the Atlantic and then the

Prairies than in other regions; and women engage in more volunteer work than men.

Transportation

Subjective health, education, region, age, and gender are all independently related to providing transportation assistance. Those in better health, with higher education, residing in the prairies, aged 55-64 and 65-69, and men rather than women, are most likely to provide assistance with transportation. Living arrangement (closely associated with marital status) is not related to providing transportation, once the effects of the other variables are taken into account.

Babysitting

Subjective health, living arrangement, region, age, and gender are related to the likelihood of babysitting. Those who are in excellent health, live with a spouse, reside on the prairies, are aged 55 to 64 and are women are most likely to babysit. Once the effect of these variables is taken into account, education no longer has an impact on the likelihood of babysitting.

Help in Someone's Home

Subjective health (excellent), region (BC and the Prairies), and gender (women) are related to providing help in the home. Living arrangement is related to providing help, with those living alone providing the most help. Age is also related, with those 65 to 69 most likely to provide assistance, followed in descending order by those aged 55 to 64, 70 to 74, 75 to 79, and 80 and over.

Personal Care Outside the Home

Only education, age, and gender are independently related to providing personal care. Those with a post-secondary education, aged 55-64 and women are most likely to offer this type of care.

Now let us turn our attention to THE RECIPIENTS OF SUPPORT PROVIDED BY OLDER PERSONS. Is it parents, children, other relatives, friends and neighbours, or organizations?

Donating Money

The distribution of recipients of money from older persons is very similar for men and women (see Chart 1) and for the four older age groups, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79 and 80+ (see Chart 2). By far the major recipient is organizations. The only notable difference is that

a higher proportion of the money donated by women when compared with men goes to other relatives. There are some fluctuations by age in the proportion giving money to other recipients, but no striking differences exist between age groups.

Unpaid Volunteer Work

As one would expect, most volunteer work is provided to organizations regardless of gender. Men and women also list friends and neighbours as recipients of voluntary assistance, suggesting that for older persons, assistance provided to family is perhaps taken-for-granted as an expected activity, while assistance to friends and neighbours is not.

Similar patterns are observed by age (Chart 4).

Transportation

The recipients of transportation do vary by gender (Chart 5) with men more likely than women to provide transportation to children and other relatives. Both genders provide transportation to parents, friends and neighbours, and organizations in similar proportions, and friends are the most likely recipients of this assistance.

Regarding age (Chart 6), those aged 65 to 69 are most likely to provide transportation for their parents. They are also the most likely to have surviving parents. Those under 75 are more likely to provide transportation for friends than those over 75, but for all age groups friends are the most common recipients.

Babysitting

There are some gender differences concerning the recipients of babysitting (Chart 7) but children are the primary recipients (87% of men, 80% of women). Note that the child is considered the recipient of the assistance, although it is generally a grandchild who is being cared for. Men are more likely to babysit for children and less likely to babysit for other relatives and friends than are women.

Concerning age (Chart 8), those 75 and over are less likely to babysit for children and more likely to babysit for other relatives and organizations than those under 74. This may reflect the relative ages of their children and grandchildren. With increasing age it is less likely that grandchildren will be young children and more likely that grandchildren will have young children of their own. Perhaps the other relatives being cared for by the oldest respondents are great-grandchildren.

Help in Someone's Home

The results for this form of assistance may be somewhat misleading because traditionally male (home maintenance and yardwork) and female (housework) forms

of help are included in one category. As Chart 9 indicates, the most likely recipients of home care are children and friends or neighbours. However, women are more likely to provide such assistance to children, while men are more likely to assist friends/neighbours and organizations than women are. The varying nature of the tasks involved may partially explain these differences.

With increasing age (Chart 10), children are more likely to be the recipients of home care while parents and other relatives are less likely to be the recipients.

Personal Care Outside the Home

To the extent that men provide personal care, it is more likely to be to other relatives and friends or neighbours than is true of women (see Chart 11). Children are equally likely to be the recipients of personal care provided by men and women (6%). Women are much more likely to provide personal care to their parents (22%) than men are (0%).

Regarding age (Chart 12), those aged 70 and over are more likely to provide personal care to friends and less likely to provide such assistance to children.

Patterns regarding parents and other relatives are irregular.

This review of the recipients of assistance indicates that there are clear differences between men and women, and among age groups. These differences are in part a reflection of differences in traditional sex roles, and of stage in the life cycle.

Summary and Conclusions

This brief review of the information collected by the 1985 General Social Survey clearly upholds the position of the National Advisory Council on Aging. That is that seniors are in fact active contributors to family members, their friends and their communities. While this study found that seniors from a variety of circumstances provide support, those in excellent health, with a post-secondary education, living with a spouse, aged 65 to 69, women, and those residing in the Prairies are most likely to provide most of the forms of assistance that were measured. Most of these findings are not surprising.

This study, however, does not provide a comprehensive review of seniors' support to others. The 1985 General Social Survey only identifies six

kinds of support. It did not ask about other forms of assistance such as shopping, running errands or emotional support. Thus, the importance of seniors' contributions may indeed be far greater than is documented here.

This report is just a beginning. It has provided a glimpse of what seniors' contributions to others probably are. Obviously, much more research on this topic is needed.

Thank you.

TABLE 1

Percentage Distribution of Men and Women Who Provided Various Types of Help in the Past 6 Months

	Men	Women
Donating Money	59	57
Volunteering	12*	16*
Transportation	26*	18*
Babysitting	14*	26*
Help in Someone's Home [1]	22*	18*
Personal Care Outside the Home	2*	6*

[1] Includes home maintenance, yardwork and housework

* There are significant differences between men and women in the likelihood of providing this type of help.

Source: 1985 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada.

Table 2

Summary of Characteristics Associated with Greatest Likelihood of Providing Assistance[1]

Independent Variables	Donating Money	Volunteer Work	Transportation	Babysitting	Help in Someone's Home	Personal Care Outside the Home
Subjective Health	* Excellent	* Excellent	* Excellent	* Excellent	* Excellent	—
Education	* Post-secondary	* Post-secondary	* Post-secondary	—	—	* Post-secondary
Living Arrangement	* With Spouse	* With Spouse	—	* With Spouse	* Alone	—
Region	* Ontario	* Atlantic	* Prairies	* Prairies	* B.C.; Prairies	—
Age	* 70-74	* 65-69	* 55-64, 65-69	* 55-64	* 65-69	* 55-64
Gender	—	* Women	* Men	* Women	* Women	* Women

[1] * = significant relationship; the group most likely to provide assistance is named

Source: Connidis & Frankovitch multivariate analysis using data from 1985 General Social Survey, Statistics Canada.

CHART 1

Distribution of Recipients of Donations of Money Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Gender of the Provider

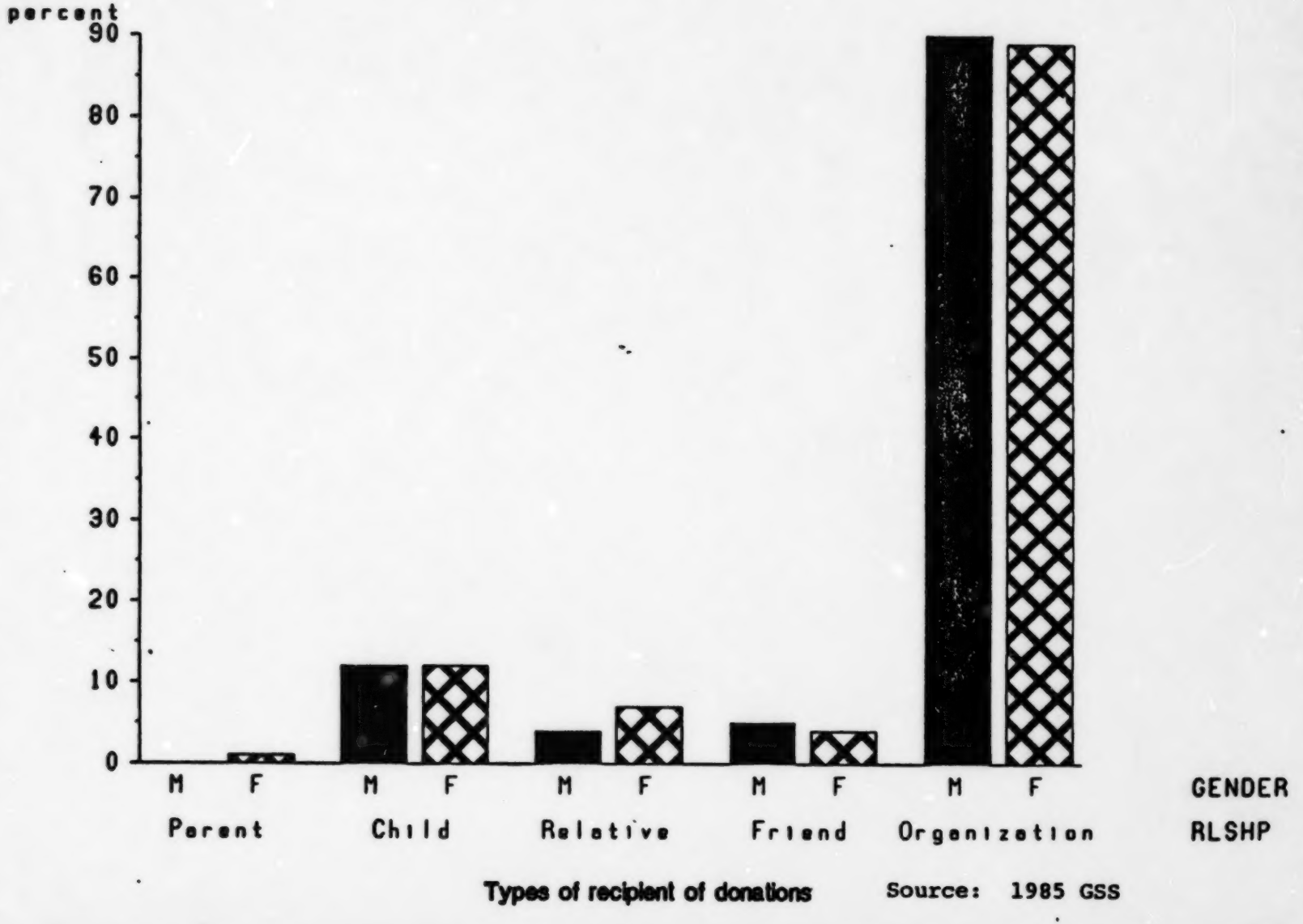
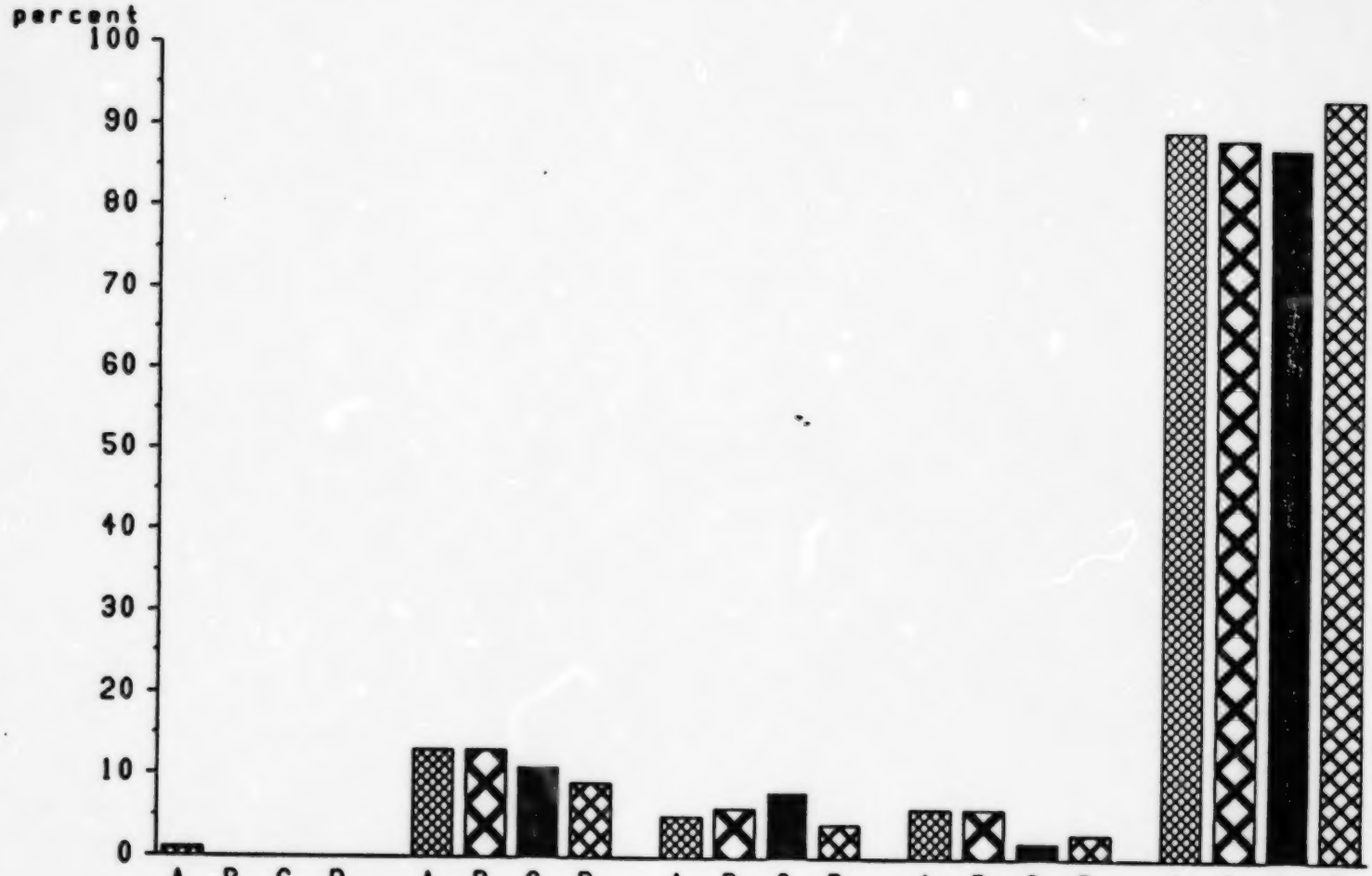


CHART 2

Distribution of Recipients of Donations Of Money Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Age of the Provider

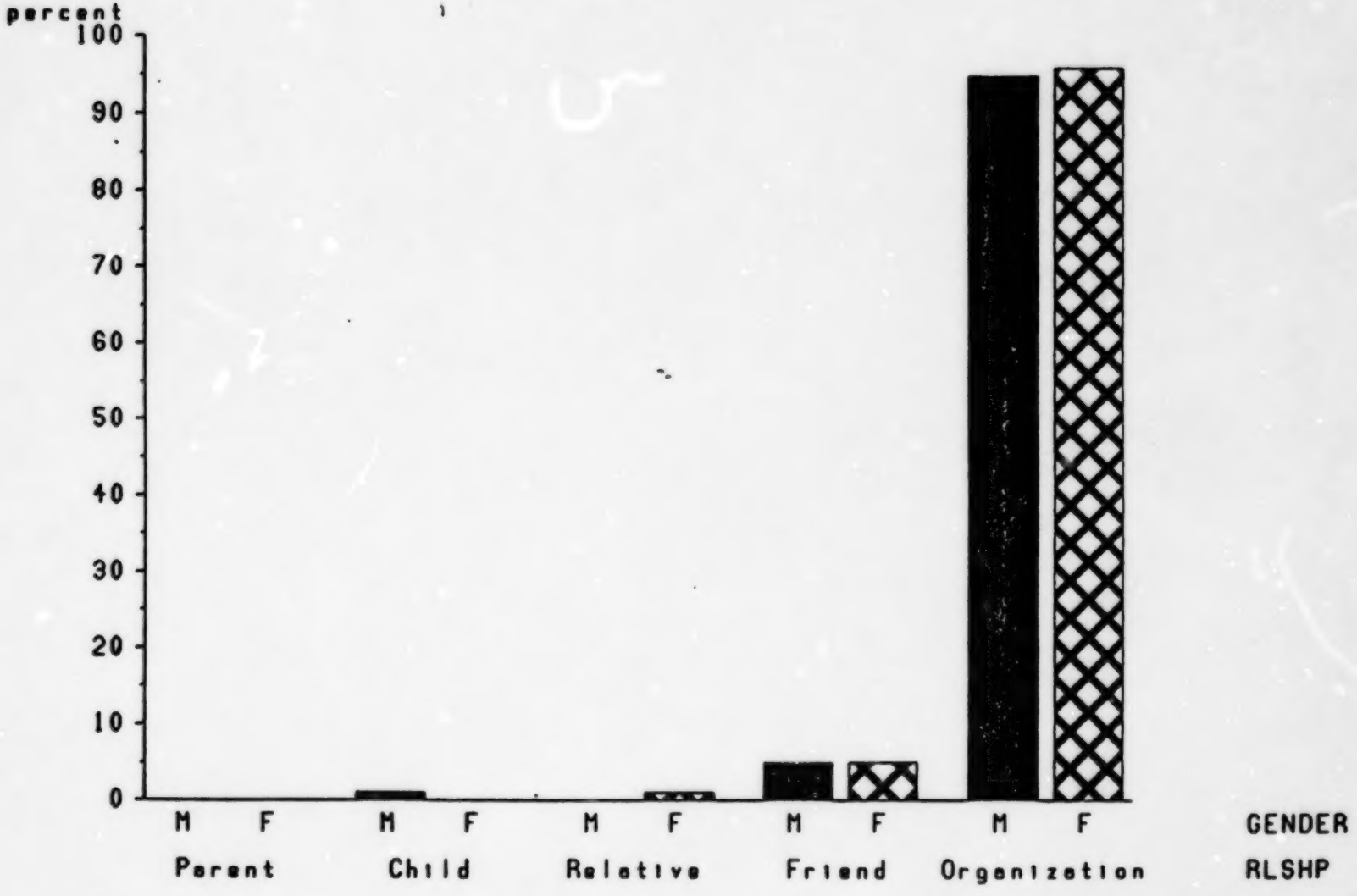


Types of recipient of donations
Age code: A-65-69 B-70-74 C-75-79 D-80+

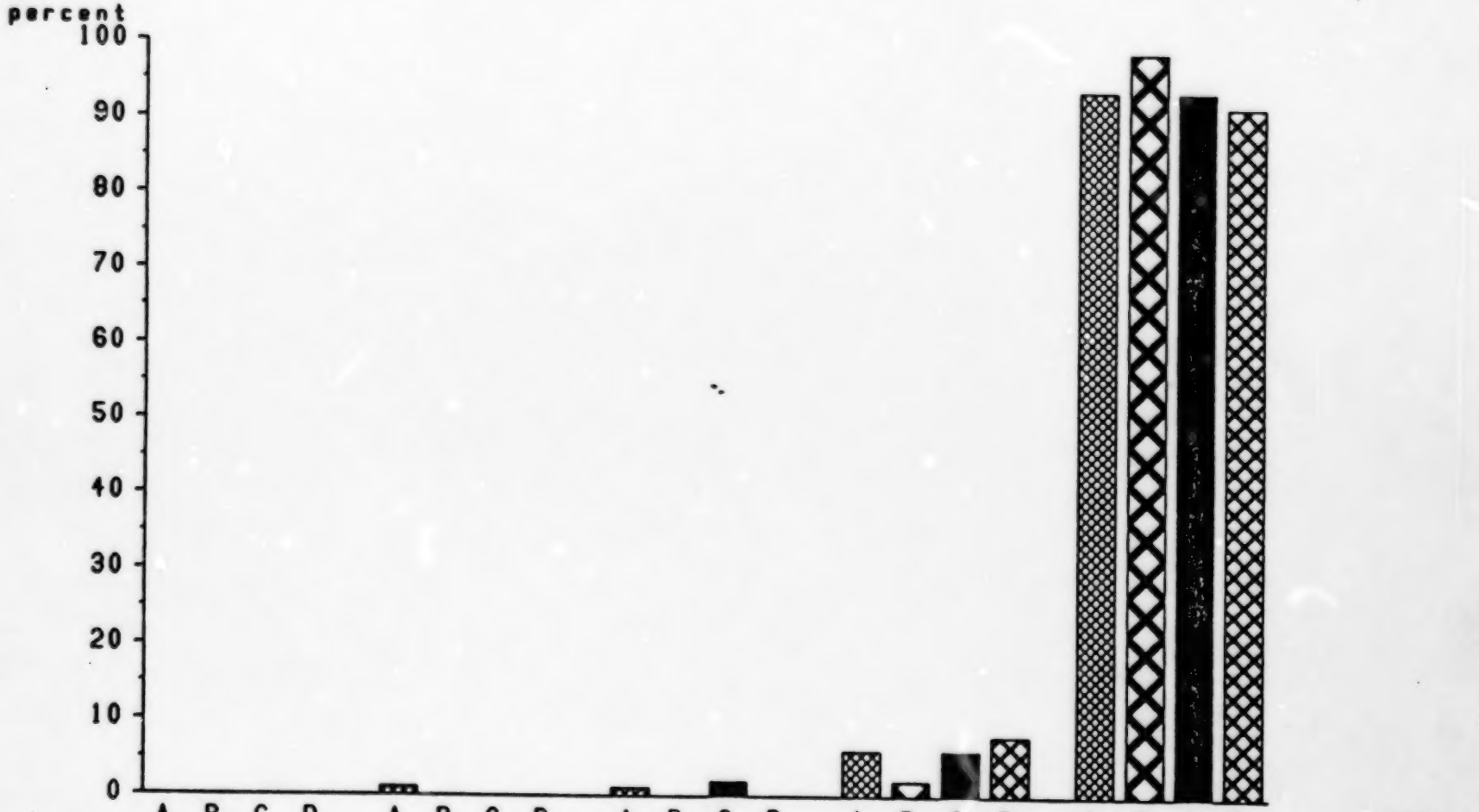
Source: 1985 GSS

CHART 3

Distribution of Recipients of Voluntary Assistance Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months, By Gender of the Provider



Distribution of Recipients of Volunteer Assistance Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Age of the Provider



Types of recipient of volunteer assistance
Age code: A=65-69 B=70-74 C=75-79 D=80+

Source: 1985 GSS

CHART 5

Distribution of Recipients of Transportation Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Gender of the Provider

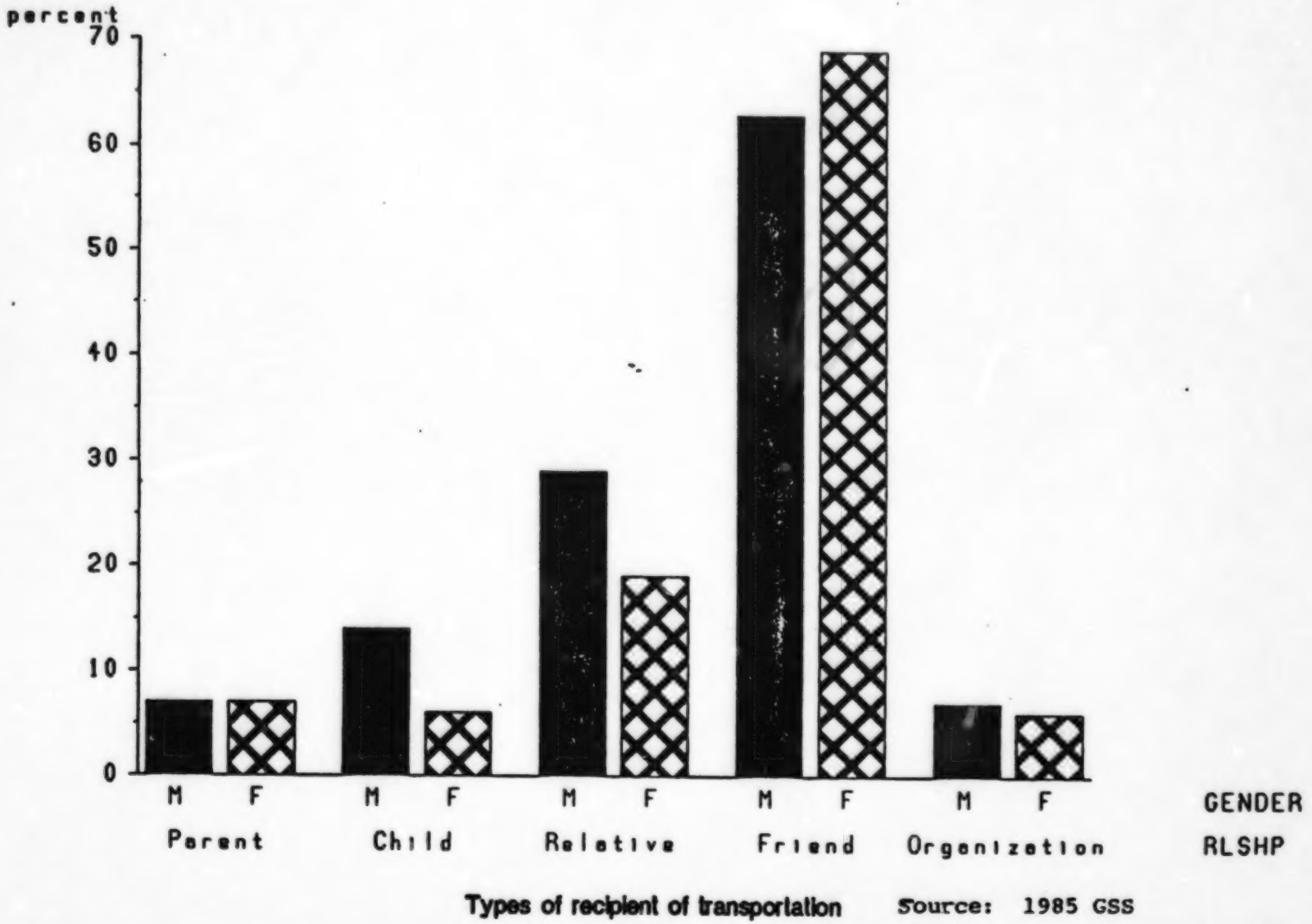
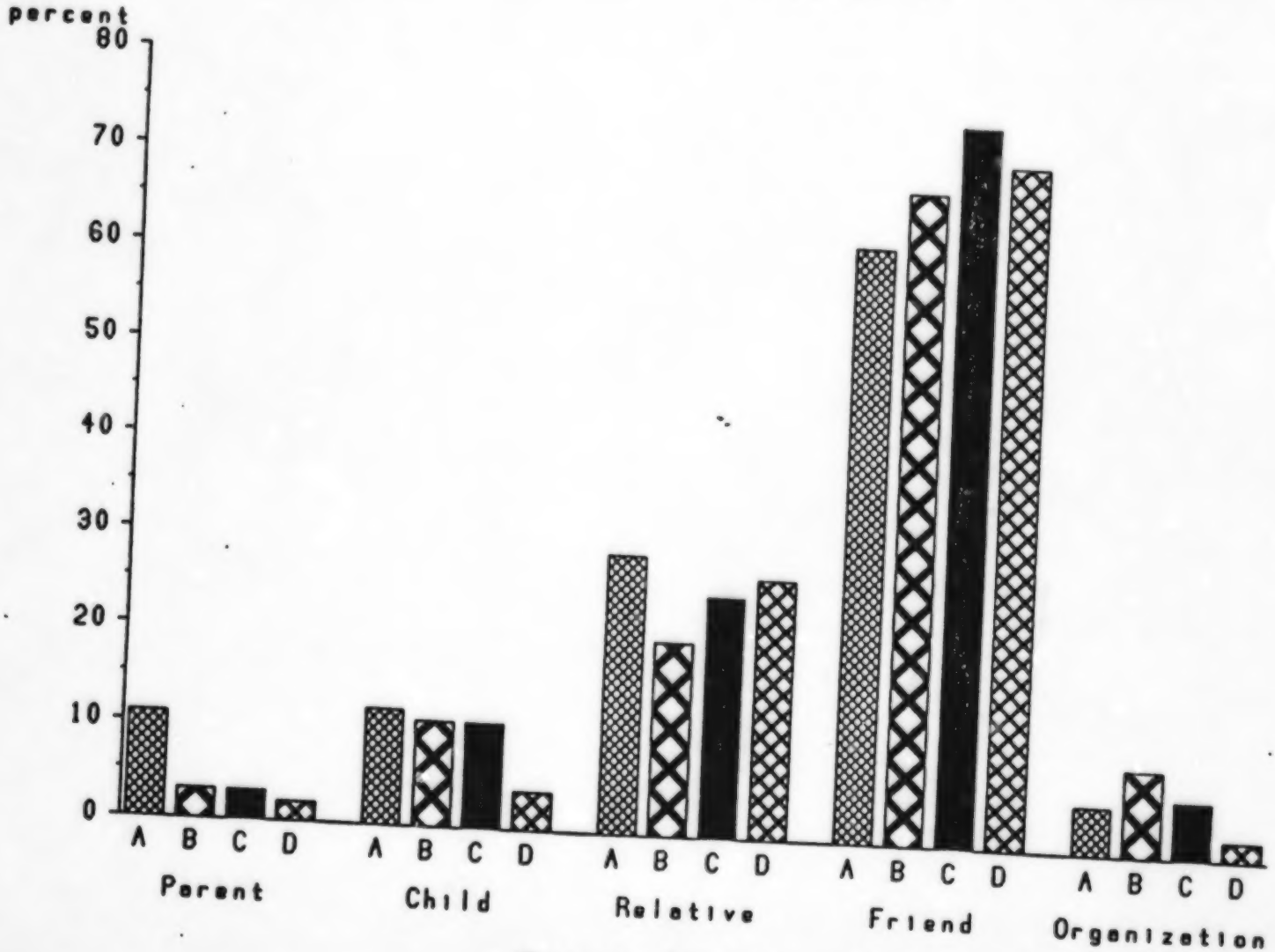


CHART 6

Distribution of Recipients of Transportation Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Age of the Provider



Types of recipient of transportation
Age code: A-65-69 B-70-74 C-75-79 D-80+

Source; 1985 GSS

CHART 7

Distribution of Recipients of Babysitting Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Gender of the Provider

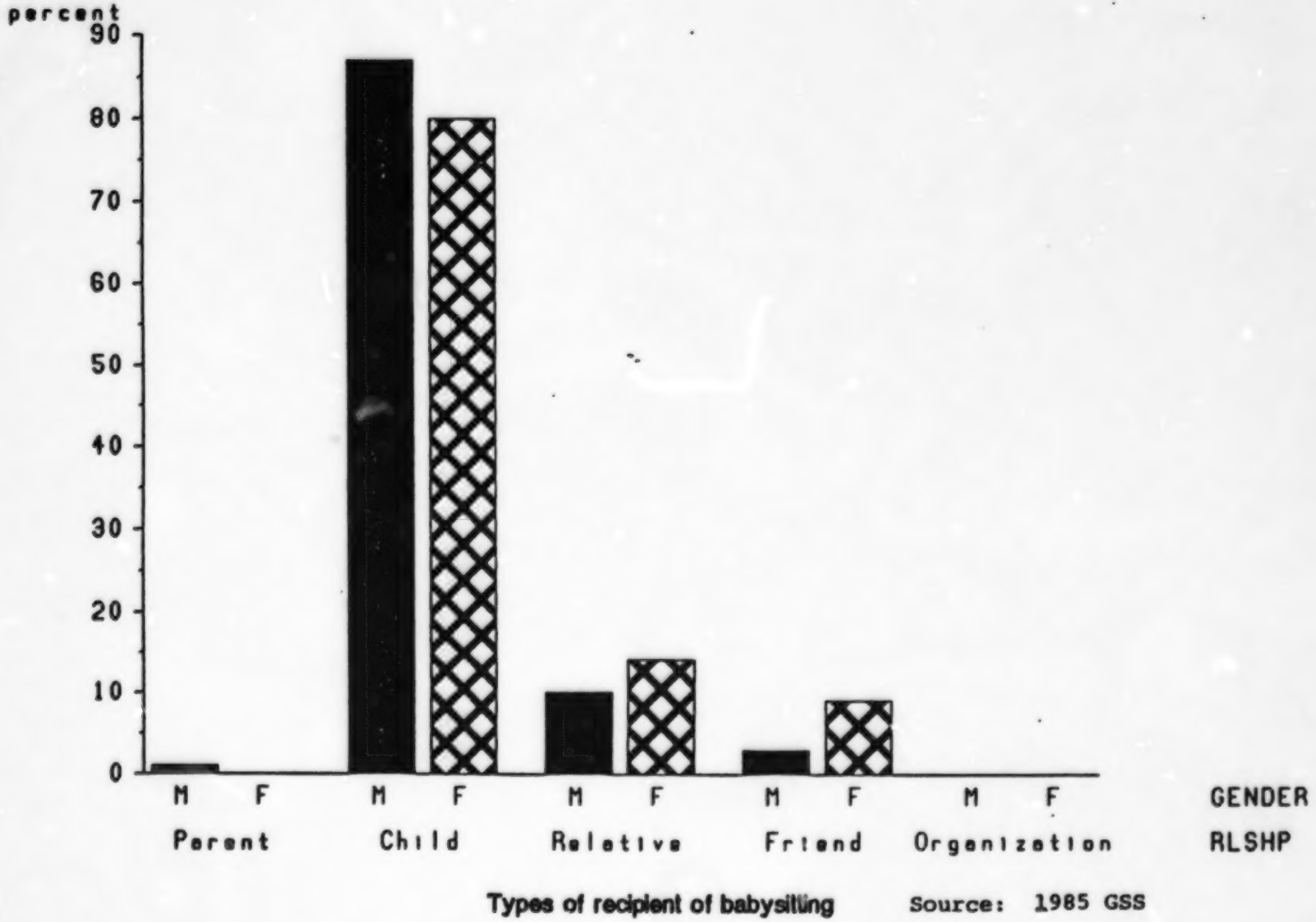


CHART 9

Distribution of Recipients of Help in Home Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Last 6 Months By Gender of the Provider

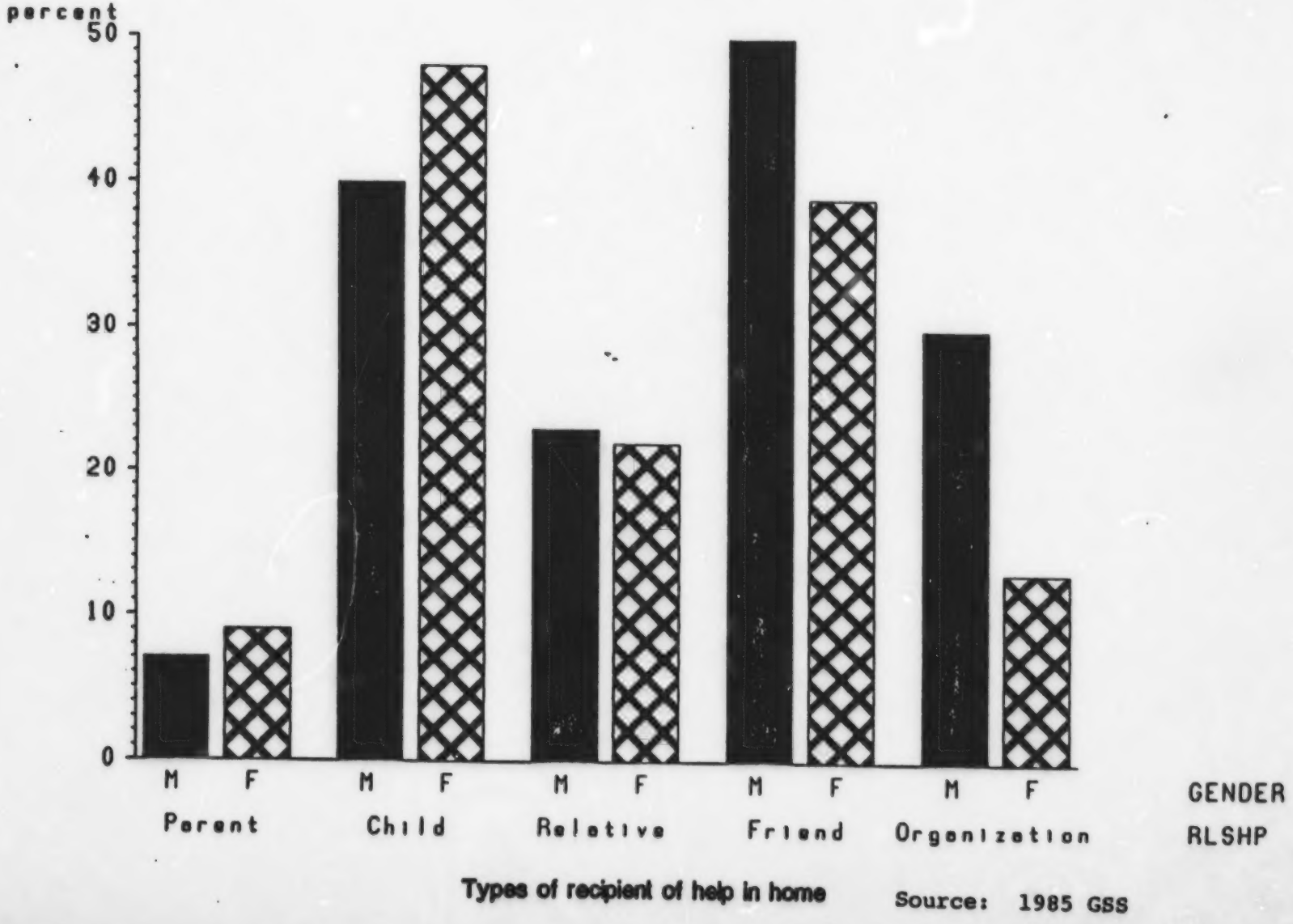
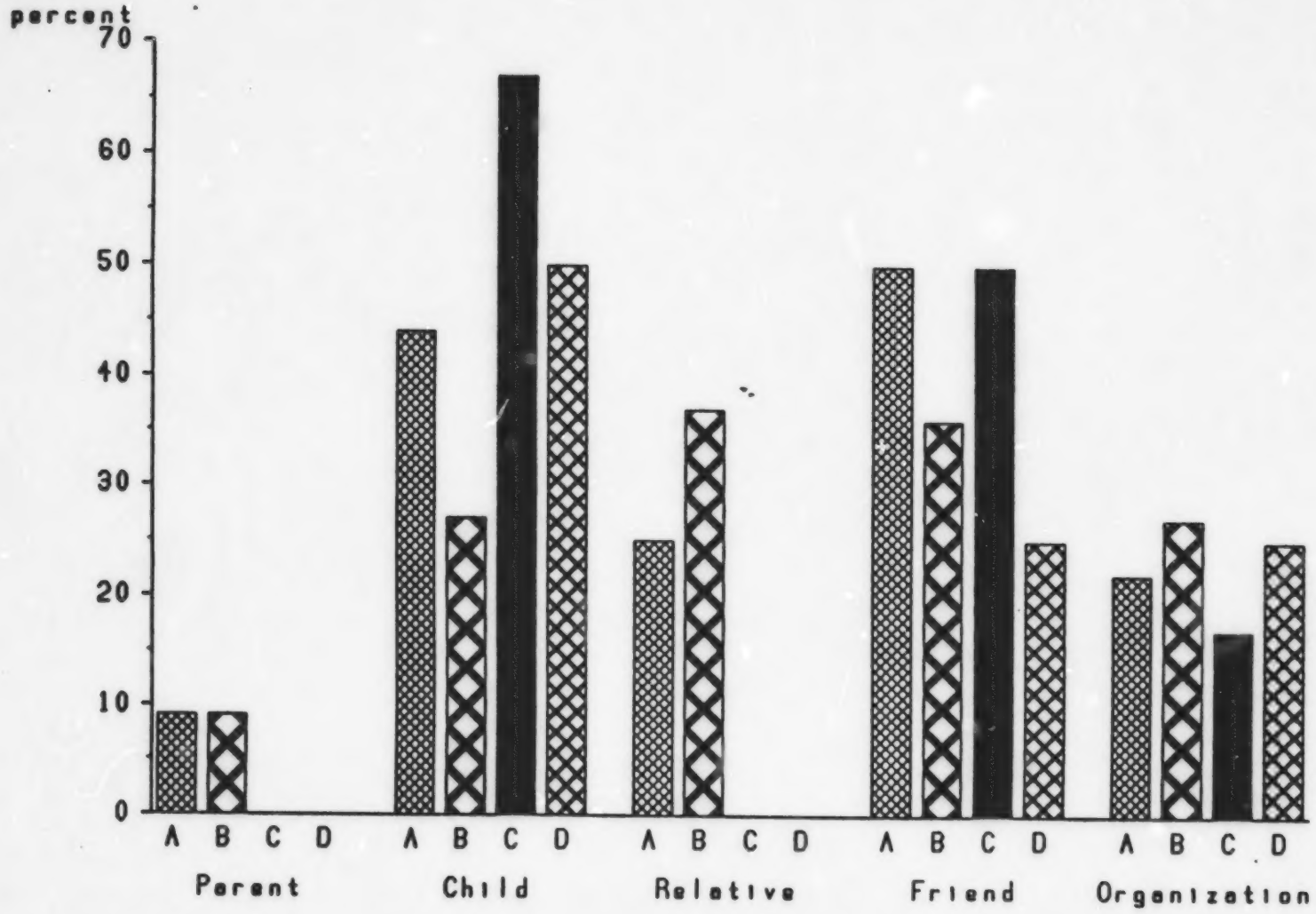


CHART 10

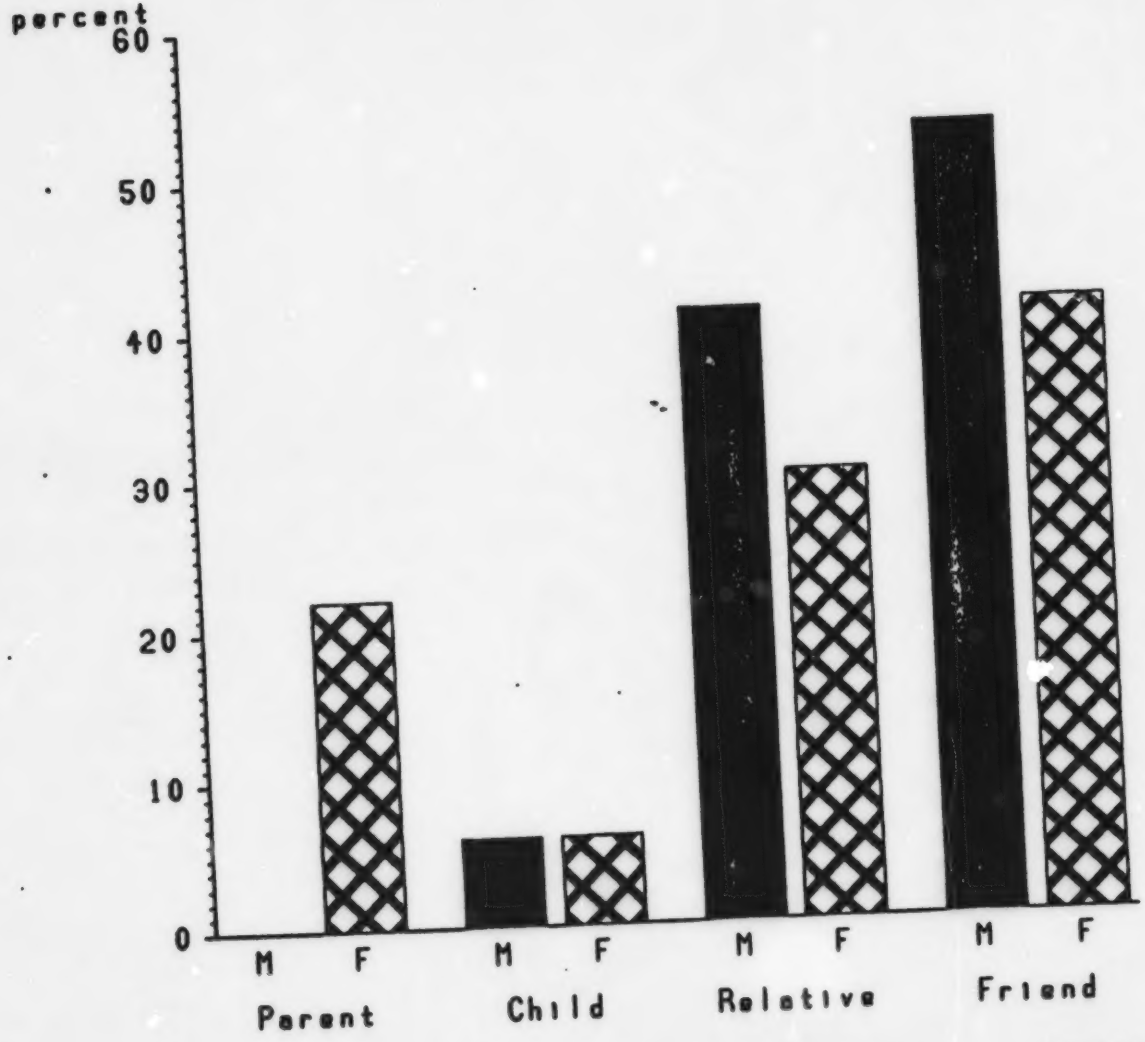
Distribution of Recipients of Help in Home Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Age of the Provider



Types of recipient of help in home
Age code: A=65-69 B=70-74 C=75-79 D=80+

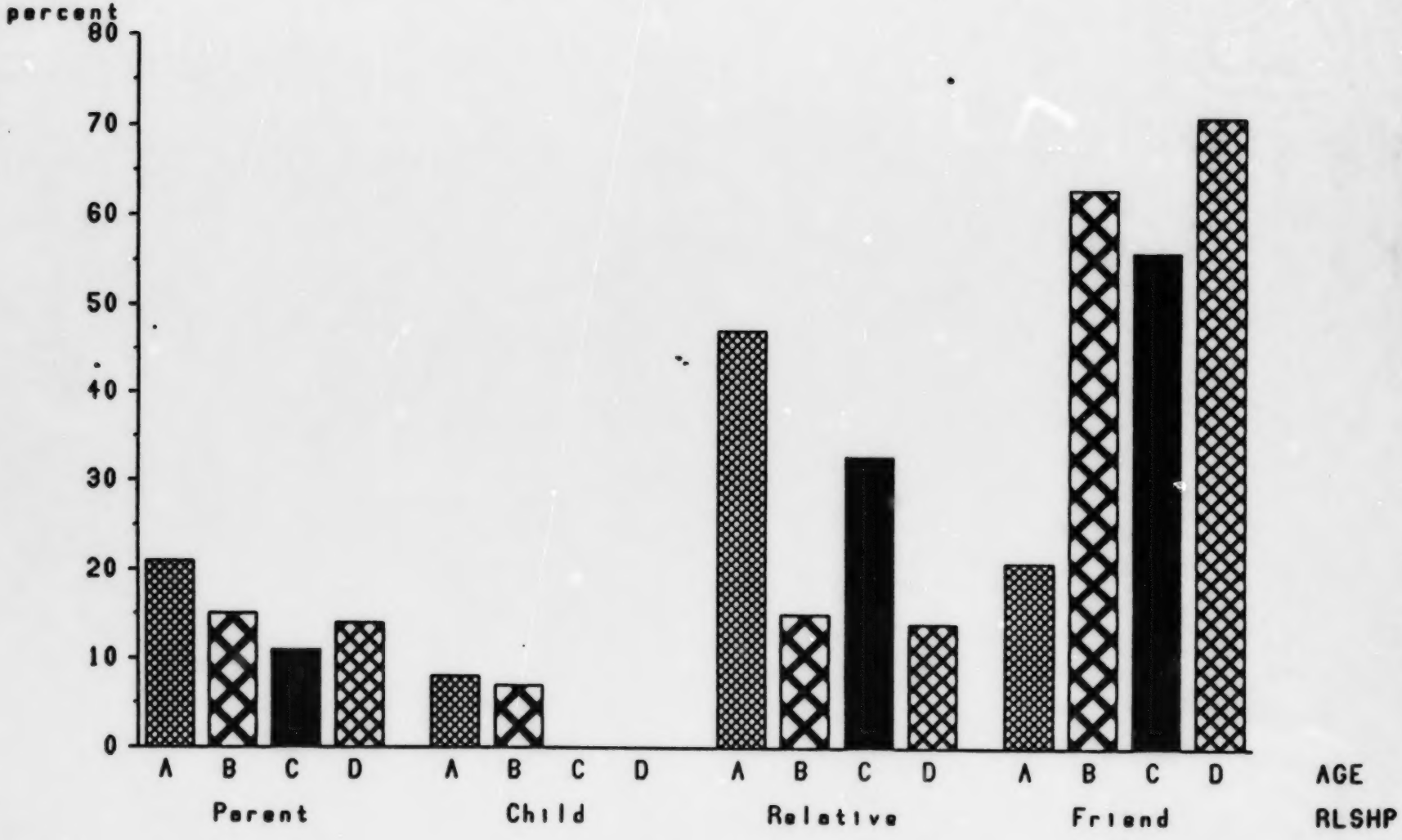
Source: 1985 GSS

Distribution of Recipients of Personal Care Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months, By Gender of the Provider



Source: 1985 GSS

Distribution of Recipients of Personal Care Provided By Persons Age 65 and Over Within the Past 6 Months By Age of the Provider



Types of recipient of personal care
Age code: A-65-69 B-70-74 C-75-79 D-80+

Source: 1985 GSS